

Suppressing Dissent

The Crackdown on Muslims in Zanzibar

Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed

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The island of Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous province of Tanzania, has been undergoing an escalating political crisis for several decades. More than 60% of the mainland population and 97% of the population of Zanzibar are Muslims. The crisis - which stems from historical injustice in the creation of the current political establishment in Zanzibar - is liable to spiral into a devastating humanitarian catastrophe, unless significant action by members of the international community is taken in advance. Since the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar in April 1964, the government has consistently attempted to suppress popular dissent against the unfavourable conditions of the prevailing regime. An ongoing programme of suppression in this respect has gradually intensified throughout the ensuing decades since 1964, with a series of unfair elections culminating in a particularly brutal crackdown in the wake of rigged elections at the end of 2000. The crackdown was initiated by the authorities to quell mounting popular protests by the Muslim opposition against the unfair electoral process, condemned by international observers. Protestors were shot or beaten to death by police accompanied by militias. At least 100 Muslim supporters of the opposition were killed in the first phase of violence, while up to a 1,000 or so fled as police broke into homes, beating, arresting and detaining civilians. Supporters and leaders of the opposition in particular were arrested and detained. Several hundred Muslims remain missing, and hundreds continue to flee the

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escalating violence into Kenya. The government, which has issued several Islamophobic statements, seems to have no qualms about using violent methods to repress popular Muslim dissent. There are reports of the appearance of mass graves in the aftermath of indiscriminate shootings by police forces. The crackdown has thus been unprecedented in its scale and viciousness, and signifies that the future of Zanzibar is likely to be fraught with increasing political turmoil and related violence.

I. The Zanzibar Revolution and Union with Tanganyika

Prior to and during the age of British colonialism, Zanzibar constituted one of the most significant intellectual and cultural centres of Islamic civilisation in East Africa under the Zanzibar Sultanate. Islam was spread along the East Africa coast mainly through trade activities.² More than 60% of the mainland Tanzanian population and 97% of the population of Zanzibar are Muslims.

When Zanzibar gained independence on 10 December 1963 from the British government, it became a member of the Commonwealth nations. It joined the United Nations on December 16, 1963 and was represented by Hilal bin Muhammed bin Hilal. Within a month of independence, violent revolution took hold of the island. On midnight of 11 January 1964 under the direction of "Field Marshal" John Okello - an Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) activist and Christian militant from Uganda - violent riots occurred. Having seen just how vulnerable a government could be, and not trusting their own mixed record in open elections, it was clear to some ASP leaders that drastic measures were warranted to secure the survival of what was now being called "The Revolution". "The mobs were unleashed. Law and order disappeared from the streets of Zanzibar. Landowners and merchants were dragged from their houses and shops; looting and killing spread throughout Stone Town. The City literally sacked itself. Arabs and Asians, who had supported the other Parties in large numbers, were killed indiscriminately. In a single night uncounted lives were lost and over the next few days thousands more fled the Islands with only what they could carry."³ Okello's forces thus killed between 5,000 and 15,000 Muslims and detained another 21,500.

Okello, however, lacked the support to create his own government, and was overpowered by the Afro-Shirazi party and the radical party, Umma. Thus, following the coup, the leader of the ASP Sheikh Abeid Amani Karume was appointed president of the newly proclaimed People's Republic of Zanzibar and Pemba, and immediately set about forming a coalition administration, the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar (SMZ). Indian and Arab Muslims fled in fear of their lives and their livelihoods, as their property was confiscated on behalf of the state. Immediately following the coup in Zanzibar, a similar outbreak occurred in Dar es

² See Lodhi, Abdulaziz Y., 'The Arabs in Zanzibar (from the Sultnate to the People's Republic)', *Journal of Institute of Minority Muslim Affairs*, 7:2, 1986; Lodhi, 'Muslims in East Africa – their past and present', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 3:1, 1994; Pouwel, R. L., *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam in the East African Coast*, Africa Studies Series 53, Cambridge, 1987.

³ Zanzibar Unveiled, 'The Zanzibar Revolution', http://home.globalfrontiers.com/zanzibar/zanzibar_revolution.htm.

Salaam, which mainland president Julius K. Nyerere's troops were able to suppress with aid from British commandos. However, as the worldwide drop in clove prices began to devastate the vulnerable Zanzibari economy, hardship deepened and popular discontent increased. Aware of his increasingly precarious position, Karume appealed to mainland Tanzania for help. After a series of talks and negotiations with Nyerere, the two agreed on a union between the two countries, and on April 26, 1964, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zanzibar - later shortened to the United Republic of Tanzania - was formed.⁴

The objective of Okello's revolution – which eventually culminated in the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar - was, according to his own testimony, for the sake of protecting and disseminating Christianity. In this respect, it is clear that Islam constituted the most prominent threat to Christianity in the region. Specialist in African Muslim history Mervyn Hiskett observes that: "Union [with Tanganyika to form Tanzania] was imposed on the Muslims of Zanzibar by Nyerere, a militant Christian and his henchman Okello against the will of the Zanzibari people, and that has been followed by a deliberate campaign to extinguish the Islamic character of Zanzibar under a secular constitution."⁵

The union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar to form Tanzania appears to have been at least tacitly supported by the Western powers to secure "stability". Nyerere was seen as a leader well capable of suppressing popular unrest among Zanzibaris. Official U.S. and CIA documents reveal that the West regarded Nyerere as the only "responsible" African leader to suppress Muslim "radicals" in the Republic of Tanzania and Zanzibar.⁶ As has been noted by Cranford Pratt, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto, regarding the process of decolonisation – particularly in Africa - "all that Hailey, Cohen and other colleagues [the British planners who drew up the plans for decolonisation] advocated can be interpreted as shrewdly designed to protect and advance British economic and political interests in these changing circumstances."⁷ In fact, the planners even admitted that the essence of decolonisation "was a plan to convert (or reconvert) formal into informal empire as the need arose", emphasising that "such colonial reform would extend the life of colonial control."⁸ The endorsement and tacit support of Julius Nyerere no doubt played an appropriate role in this plan. As noted by Bruce McKim, a Yale anthropology student who has studied Zanzibar, "Zanzibaris had to be called Africans and were forced to deny their Indian Ocean heritage. [They] are reacting to this pressure from the mainland to incorporate Zanzibar as another province. The idea of pan-Africanism was created by foreigners and the Union loosely arranged with American pressure."⁹

II. The Marginalisation of Muslims Under CCM Rule

It was thus not long before bleak economic realities came to bear. Karume found himself ploughing an increasingly lonely furrow, becoming more and more unpopular. In 1970 his government was accused by opponents of human rights violations and

⁴ Heath, Elizabeth, 'Zanzibar', *Africana.Com*, http://www.africana.com/tt_704.htm; All About Zanzibar, 'Independence: 1964 to Present', Eland Limited, <http://www.allaboutzanzibar.com/History&archive/5-a-timeline-1.htm>.

⁵ Hiskett, Mervyn, *The Course of Islam in Africa*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1994, p. 170.

⁶ See Wilson, Amrit, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Revolution: The Creation of Tanzania*, Pluto Press, London, 1989.

⁷ Cited in Gifford, Prosser and Louis, W. Roger (eds.), *The transfer of power in Africa: Decolonisation 1940-1960*, Yale University Press, London, 1982, p. 261.

⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 42, 51.

⁹ Cited in Aidi, Hisham, 'Ballots and Bombs in Zanzibar', *Africana.Com*, 4 January 2001, http://www.africana.com/index_20010104.htm.

even the continued support of Nyerere on the mainland failed to stem the increasing tide of unpopularity. Consequently, Karume was assassinated on 7th April 1972 at the ASP headquarters in Zanzibar Town. Karume's successor was Aboud Jumbe Mwinyi, who also had a long history with the ASP. On 5 February 1977 he merged the ASP with Nyerere's Tanzania African National Union (TANU) to form the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution, CCM).¹⁰

Nyerere's Presidency lasted for nearly 30 years until 1989 as the President and the Chairman of the ruling party in Tanzania. As noted by Tanzanian scholar Professor Hamza Mustafa Njozi - Senior Lecturer in Literature and current Chair in the Department of Literature at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, "The fact that Mwalimu Nyerere modelled Tanganyika's national ideal after the prayer of a Roman Catholic saint inspired both hope and fear. It enkindled the hope that Nyerere and his team of leaders would be as dedicated as Saint Francis was in translating the dream into reality. It also awakened the fear that Nyerere was so profoundly influenced by the teachings of his church that he might consider its doctrines and ideals as necessarily coinciding with those of independent Tanganyika."¹¹ Thus, in 1972 Nyerere stated that his efforts to build African socialism in Tanzania constituted an attempt to implement in practical terms the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹² Although Nyerere publicly advocated secularism, he privately "championed the sectional interests of his own church," thereby promoting the Catholic community at the expense of the Muslim community.¹³

In 1970 Nyerere invited to the State House the then Secretary General of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) - the largest Christian denomination of Catholic Church - Rev. Robert Rweyemamu, and the Pope's Representative to Tanzania Mgr. Giovano Cerrano. He informed them that he was doing all in his power to strengthen Catholicism in the country. Nyerere also stated that he established in the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) a Department of Political Education to be directed by a Christian minister, primarily due to his faith in Catholicism. His responsibility was "to guide and control the political direction of the party." He also admitted that in the Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) two members were Reverends, which he believed was the best way of ensuring that the party recruited "good people." The implication was that "Catholics could now use Parliament to promote their religious interests if they so wished."¹⁴ These interests, by their nature, inherently entailed staunch opposition toward the Islamic faith and its practitioners. Accordingly, the Roman Catholic Church in Tanzania had established a Department whose primary task was to fight both communists and Muslims in Tanzania. Fr. Schildknecht was Director of this department between 1959 and 1966. In its report on the task, the Church observed the increasing popularity of Islam in Tanzania, and warned that the speedy growth of Muslim faith would greatly weaken Christianity. The church was particularly worried by the unity and organisational capacity of Muslims under the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS).¹⁵

¹⁰ All About Zanzibar, 'Independence: 1964 to Present', op. cit.

¹¹ Njozi, Hamza Mustafa, *Mwembechai Killings and the Political Future of Tanzania*, Globalink Communications, Ottawa, 2000, Chapter 1. Available online at <http://www.islamtz.org/mwembechai/>. In 1998 Dr. Njozi served as an East African Visiting Scholar at the Centre of African Studies in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. In the following year he served as a Fulbright Scholar at the Center for African Studies, University of Florida.

¹² *Christian Century*, 1 March 1972.

¹³ Njozi, op. cit., Chapter 1.

¹⁴ Van Bergen, Jan P., *Development and Religion in Tanzania: Sociological Soundings on Christian Participation in Rural Transformation*, Christian Literature Society and Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, Leiden, 1981, p. 333-336; Njozi, op. cit., Chapter 1.

¹⁵ Sivalon, John C., *Kanisa katoliki na siasa ya Tanzania bara 1953 hadi 1985*, Benedictine Publications Ndanda, Peramiho, 1992, p. 35-37

Since the Church had concluded that the EAMWS was a danger to Christianity, Mwalimu Nyerere used his political powers to undercut the organisation and impose instead on the Muslim community a corrupt puppet group, BAKWATA.¹⁶

On 25 February 1965, Nyerere banned the Muslim Education Union that was founded to train Muslims who were not permitted to attend government primary schools. In 1968 he banned the EAMWS with the following statement: "The Minister of Home Affairs has by command of the President declared the Tanzania Branch of the East African Muslims Welfare Society (EAMWS) and Tanzania Council of the East African Muslim Welfare Society to be unlawful societies under the provisions of section 6(1) of the Societies Ordinance."¹⁷ As its title suggests, the EAMWS was a welfare organisation whose prime purpose was to provide education and health services for the Muslim community throughout Tanzania. Africa historian Abdulaziz Lodhi notes that it was "founded in Mombasa in 1945 [with] the aim of promoting Islam and raising the standard of living for the East African Moslems. EAMWS concentrated on building schools and mosques, providing scholarships and spreading literature. There were also plans for founding an Islamic university in Zanzibar or Mombasa, but they were never realized."¹⁸ The President himself subtly, but clearly, admitted the consequences in terms of a stark disparity in education between Muslims and Christians: "The enmity which could be stirred by the evil minded between Muslims and Christians as we all know, the colonial government did not concern itself very much with education and therefore the majority of those who managed to acquire did so in the mission schools, and are therefore mostly Christians. Here again, then we have a division which by its very existence constitutes a political threat to unity."¹⁹ It is also not surprising that Nyerere's staunchly pro-Catholic policy resulted in the marginalisation of Muslims not only educationally, but politically. In 1970, Roman Catholics could boast that they constituted 70% of the 75% elected Christian members of Parliament. Out of the 108 elected Members of Parliament, 23 were Muslim, 5 Traditionalist and 80 Christian.²⁰

A similar state of affairs continues today. In 1993 there were 8 Muslim District Commissioners against 113 Christian. In the Prime Minister's Office, the Prime Minister himself, his Principal Secretary, Deputy Principal Secretary, and all the five Directors were all Christian. In the Civil Service Department a Christian Principal Secretary was assisted by five directorates all of which were also headed by Christians. The Tanzania Electoral Commission had seven members all of whom were Christian except one member from Zanzibar. The Tanzania Law Review Commission had nine members all of whom were Christian except one member from Zanzibar. Notably, in the same year former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere publicly admitted the existence of religious hatred against Muslims in Tanzania, particularly Zanzibari Muslims.²¹

Indeed, in his seminal study, *Mwembechai Killings and the Political Future of Tanzania* – a book that was banned by the Tanzanian government even before it was to be distributed in the country²² – Professor Njozi provides extensive documentation of a systematic policy of religious discrimination against Muslims in all areas of

¹⁶ Njozi, op. cit., Chapter 1.

¹⁷ *The Standard*, 20 December 1968.

¹⁸ Lodhi, Abdulaziz. Y., and Westerlund, David, 'African Islam in Tanzania', in *Majoritetens Islam*, Stockholm, 1994.

¹⁹ Nyerere, Julius Kambarage, *Freedom and Unity: A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1952-65*, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1967, p. 179.

²⁰ Sivalon, op. cit., p. 49.

²¹ Njozi, op. cit., Chapter 4.

²² Panafrican News Agency, 4 August 2000.

Tanzanian society. He observes that: "The unstated but effective policy of marginalising Muslims in education, employment and political appointments is not of recent origin. It began and was firmly entrenched during the twenty-five years of Mwalimu Nyerere's political rule. And I believe unless this problem is openly addressed Tanzania may also find itself engulfed in civil strife."²³ Njozi's conclusions echo the grim assessment of earlier research by other scholars, such as Mazrui and Tidy who admit that the political leverage of Muslims in Tanzania was well below commensurate levels, to the extent that "Most observers do not even realise that there are more Muslims than Christians in Tanzania". They further pointed out that "the risk that Muslims might become increasingly discontented as they witness a disproportionate share of privilege enjoyed by Christians continue to hang over Tanzania, especially in the years which would follow the departure of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere."²⁴

The socio-political policy was accompanied by a government campaign of violent repression. Since the 1964 revolution, the government has consistently attempted to forcefully suppress elements that fail to support the prevailing regime. For example: "Pemba island has been the object of state repression and systematic underdevelopment since the Revolution of 1964," observe anthropologists Nathalie Arnold and Bruce McKim of Indiana and Yale University respectively. "The Revolution took place on the main island of Unguja, and Pemba's inhabitants, because they did not participate in, nor generally support it, have since been regarded by the Revolutionary and Union governments as dangerous, disloyal citizens, and have been treated as such. During the post-Revolutionary period, military forces in Pemba engaged in public beatings, humiliation, torture, rapes and the looting of property with full state support, as part of a campaign aimed at cowing the population and suppressing any potential opposition. At that time, the Zanzibar government's unrestrained brutality against its own citizens garnered international condemnation."²⁵ The historical realities of authoritarian rule and state repression have continued to shape the turn of events to this day. The United Republic of Tanzania amended its Constitution in 1992 to become a multiparty state, and in late 1995, conducted its first multiparty general elections for president and parliament in more than 30 years. The main candidates were from the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party and the Civic United Front (CUF). The CUF has "campaigned for greater autonomy for Zanzibar". "[S]upporting the introduction of Islamic Sharia (law) in Zanzibar", the party is popular among Zanzibar's Muslims.²⁶

The October 1995 elections in Zanzibar thus constituted the territory's first countrywide multi-party elections since 1964 - but were widely believed to have been rigged by the ruling party, the CCM. Although the CUF lost the elections to the CCM, Ann Pitsch of the Center for International Development and Conflict Prevention in Maryland records that "International observers noted many irregularities in the elections, and some observers stated that the CUF should have been declared the winner."²⁷ Indeed, "Local government officials" in Zanzibar "prohibited the assembly of CUF supporters and use of CUF slogans from the October 1995 election until August. During that 10-month period, Zanzibar officials refused CUF applications for permits, citing a threat to public order. Police dispersed meetings attended by

²³ Njozi, op. cit., Chapter 1. See *ibid.*, Chapter 3 for a detailed review of the statistical evidence for the systematic marginalisation of Muslims in education, employment and government.

²⁴ Mazrui, A. A. and Tidy, M., *Nationalism and New States in Africa*, Heinemann, London, p. 222-225.

²⁵ Arnold, Nathalie and McKim, Bruce, 'Zanzibaries Beseiged by Tanzanian Security Forces', Civic United Front, 29th January 2001, http://www.cuftz.org/potpourri/zanzibar_besieged.html.

²⁶ 'World alarm at Zanzibar political crisis', *Mail & Guardian*, 14 January 1998.

²⁷ Pitsch, Anne, *Ethnic Conflict in Tanzania: Zanzibaris*, Minorities at Risk Project, Center for International Development and Conflict Prevention, University of Maryland, 26 August 1999.

persons thought to be opposed to the Zanzibar Government.” The U.S. State Department thus reported that: “International observers noted serious discrepancies during the vote-counting process, calling into question the re-election of CCM incumbent Dr. Salmin Amour Juma as Zanzibar’s President. In the period since that election, opposition parties called for new elections, prompting reprisals by the authorities, and, in response, most donors halted aid to Zanzibar.”²⁸

Seif Sharif Hamad, leader and presidential candidate of the Civic United Front, the primary and most broadly based opposition party in the territory, called for peace and calm. Although many believed that he would have won a free and fair election, Seif Sharif undertook a long and sustained campaign for diplomatic intervention and reconciliation. Rather than placating the opposition, the ruling CCM party instead mounted a campaign of reprisals against CUF members.²⁹ As the State Department reported on 1996 developments: “Although the 1995 multiparty elections represented an important development, citizens’ right to change their government in Zanzibar is severely circumscribed... [P]olice often harassed and intimidated members and supporters of the political opposition.” The Muslim CUF in particular has been a primary victim of government attempts at suppression of the opposition. “In the year since the election, government security forces and CCM gangs harassed and intimidated CUF members on both of the two main Zanzibar islands, Pemba and Ugunja”, reports the State Department. “Because CUF won all 20 seats on Pemba, Pembans living on Ugunja were regarded as CUF supporters and as a result were harassed. CUF members accused police of detaining dozens of its members, including several local leaders. Many CUF supporters have deserted Ugunja for Pemba or the mainland. Safety is not ensured in Pemba, where security forces dispersed gatherings, intimidated and roughed up individuals, and expelled two tourists in September for their contact with CUF members.”³⁰

The 1999 State Department’s human rights report on Tanzania adds, regarding the 1995 elections: “Further, registration was limited to persons who had maintained the same residence for 5 years, which disenfranchised many voters. CUF Party members also were detained by police when they attempted to campaign in rural areas... In the 3 years since the election, government security forces and CCM gangs harassed and intimidated CUF members on both main Zanzibar islands, Pemba and Ugunja.”³¹ Thus, reports the *Economist*, by 1997 “a by-election won by the CUF came to nothing after 18 party activists, including members of the local parliament, were thrown in prison and charged with treason. They have still not been tried.”³²

The ruling CCM claims that the CUF has been linked to terrorism with the view to support a violent rebellion to topple the government, and impose the political separation of Zanzibar from the mainland to establish an independent state.³³ Consequently, “CUF supporters, many of whom are Arabs, have been harassed and intimidated by police, especially on the island of Pemba.” However, Pitsch points out that: “It does not appear that [CUF supporters] have the will or means to support a rebellion on the islands, nor does the CUF, which is popular amongst both Arabs and Shirazi, support total independence for Zanzibar.” Rather, the main grievance of the opposition is that “the islands’ economies are in poor shape and the people want

²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Tanzania Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Washington DC, 30 January 1997.

²⁹ Arnold, Nathalie and McKim, Bruce, op. cit.

³⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Tanzania Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996*, op. cit.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, *Tanzania Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Washington DC, 26 February 1999.

³² *Economist*, 2 November 2000.

³³ *Mail & Guardian*, 14 January 1998.

greater control over their resources and livelihoods.” Ongoing government persecution and failed policies have meant that: “Zanzibaris tend to distrust the CCM... The vast majority of islanders are Muslims as are about one-third of mainlanders. However, whereas the mainland has been secular in nature, the islands” are inclined to rule by Islamic law. “This concerns the government because it is not willing to allow the islands to rule according to Islamic law,” even if that be the democratic obligation in terms of the demands of the majority of the population.³⁴

The systematic violence meted out on opposition to the ruling regime in order to crush legitimate dissent, particularly the CUF and its civilian supporters “has not come about suddenly and without cause” according to anthropologists Arnold and McKim. “It should not be understood as a peculiar and inexplicable ‘African crisis’ with primordial roots. It is the direct result of four decades of authoritarian rule and the systematic silencing of free speech and brutal quelling of opposition.”³⁵

III. The Escalation of Repression in 2000 and Beyond

In mid-1999, the opposition CUF and the ruling CCM signed an agreement to end their political conflict. Zanzibar was to gain greater autonomy in exchange for recognising and cooperating with the CCM government. The agreement was met by territory-wide relief and the re-emergence of hope for a peaceful solution. But the CCM government failed to implement the agreement, and implemented none of its stipulations.³⁶ With Zanzibar’s second multi-party elections nearing towards the end of 2000, the opposition was consistently denied permits to hold rallies. In one instance at Kilimahewa, Unguja, the police shot into a seated crowd, severely injuring six men and wounding others. Bureaucratic sabotage on the part of ruling party officials severely undermined the fairness of the registration period. According to observer reports, the elections were rendered further obsolete by the mass ferrying of unregistered voters by CCM party leaders to opposition strongholds, systematic intimidation of voters, and, ultimately, a military takeover that put departing CCM president Salmin Amour (who objected to mainland interference in Zanzibari affairs) under house arrest.³⁷

As the *Economist* reported, “The vote had gone seriously wrong. In areas that the opposition Civic United Front (CUF) could have been expected to win, voting papers turned up late. Voters were made to wait for as long as 12 hours, or told to cast their ballots elsewhere. Some ballot-boxes and papers were stolen, and children and non-Zanzibaris were seen voting for the ruling party. Before the vote, CUF had almost no access to radio or newspapers, and its posters were conspicuously absent.”³⁸ The CCM government deployed army and police across both islands to “seize all ballot boxes, counted and uncounted”. They proceeded to carry out “extraordinary beatings of opposition party agents who had been present in the polling stations to monitor the votes”, the objective being to “forestall a clear CUF victory”.³⁹ Immediately after the vote, the Commonwealth observer team reported that the elections were a “shambles” and revealed a “colossal contempt” for democracy. The observers further concluded that “the elections should be held again in their entirety”. The opposition agreed, demanding a new vote and reform of the electoral council.⁴⁰ The Associated Press similarly reported that according to “international observers”, the elections

³⁴ Pitsch, op. cit.

³⁵ Arnold, Nathalie and McKim, Bruce, op. cit.

³⁶ Ibid. Also see Pitsch, op. cit.

³⁷ Arnold and McKim, op. cit.

³⁸ *Economist*, 2 November 2000.

³⁹ Arnold and McKim, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Aidi, Hisham, op. cit.; *Economist*, 2 November 2000.

“were deeply flawed”, “marred by violence, as well as allegations of ballot-rigging and police intimidation.”⁴¹

With the announcement of the CCM victory, thousands of Zanzibaris took part in public demonstrations to protest and throw stones. The protests elicited a violent response from security forces that was unprecedented in its ferocity. The following weeks saw security forces shoot into gatherings, tear gas people in their homes, and beat civilians before the press and international observers. All over Pemba and in Unguja’s urban areas, police accompanied by local militia broke into the homes of opposition members, beat them, and arrested scores of others. Notably, similar demonstrations occurred throughout Tanzania – yet only in predominantly Muslim Zanzibar did Tanzanian security crackdown with such indiscriminate brutality.

Over 20 protestors were shot or beaten to death in the initial clashes, with scores more killed or injured in house-to-house searches for opposition supporters. According to CUF official Musa Haji, a member of Zanzibar’s House of Representatives, the party had confirmed from the reports of relatives of victims that from January 26-30, 51 Muslims had been killed across Pemba’s three main towns. Seven more supporters were killed on the larger island, Unguja. Two boats carrying as many as 50 people each from Pemba to neighboring Kenya sank when police fired on them from a helicopter, their passengers are feared to have drowned. Around 300 to 400 other people were missing, with a further 300 arrested by police. At least 100 civilians were killed.⁴²

The Kenyan Red Cross has raised concerns about the increasing numbers of refugees streaming from Zanzibar into Kenya’s coast. Hundreds had already fled in the wake of initial violence, with more refugees anticipated in the wake of further expected police brutality. The number of refugees has swiftly risen to over a thousand. A recent CUF report on human rights abuses by Tanzanian security since 26 January 2001 notes that all CUF leaders “have been arrested, are in hiding, or have disappeared.” Tanzanian security forces have “engaged in a coordinated program to place Zanzibar under military rule and to inflict massive human rights violations on its people.” According to CUF officials, protests are planned to continue until Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa and the international community address opposition allegations.

The recent crackdown has been met with disgust by impartial observers. Danish Minister for Development Co-operation, Anita Bay Bundergaard, commented: “I was shocked by the police brutality against civilians in Zanzibar last month which led to the tragic loss of many lives. Excessive use of force by the police and other security units against civilians exercising their constitutional rights to peaceful assembly cannot be justified. The aftermath has brought additional assaults, arrests and other human rights abuses and as a result many Zanzibarians have taken refuge in Kenya.”⁴³ The Minister’s remarks echoed the statement of the Tanzanian capital’s independent Legal Aid Committee (LAC): “The Legal Aid Committee of the Faculty of Law of the University of Dar es Salaam strongly and unreservedly condemns the senseless killings of over 15 members and supporters of the Civic United Front (CUF) in the Islands of Zanzibar and Pemba by the members of the Tanzania Police Force on Saturday, 27th January, 2001 and the injuring of hundreds of others in both islands and in Dar es Salaam in the process of their exercise of their democratic and

⁴¹ Associated Press, ‘Opposition: Police in Zanzibar killed more than 50 people’, 2 February 2001.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Bundergaard, Anita Bay, ‘Police Brutality in Tanzania’, *International Herald Tribune*, 10 February 2001.

constitutional right to peaceful assembly as guaranteed in the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977. The Committee equally condemns the arrest, harassment, torture, injury and incarceration of the leaders, members and supporters of the Civic United Front (CUF) in Dar es Salaam on 26th January, 2001 for exercising their constitutional and democratic right to peaceful assembly as guaranteed in the Constitution of the land.” The crackdown, according to the LAC, “is a clear prelude to fascism.”⁴⁴

Indeed, Alexander Amani Muganda, Tanzania’s High Commissioner to Zimbabwe, has made several declarations illustrating the Government’s anti-Muslim stance. He accused Western countries of spearheading a conspiracy to help “Muslims take over the isles of Zanzibar and Pemba”. According to Muganda, the present crisis in Zanzibar was instigated by “the Arabs or the Shirazis as they would prefer to be known today”. He noted that “the population of Zanzibar now is 750,000 and that the Arabs are 250,000 and the rest are Africans who number 500,000”. He also argued that Arabs were bent on gaining control of the country with the help of the British and Arab powers. He called for “southern African states and governments (particularly Tanzania and Zimbabwe) to take urgent steps to fight the opposition parties which are used by the Western donors to undermine popularly elected Governments.” Opposition parties, he claimed, are being used by “whites” and “Arabs” to push the countries into anarchy.⁴⁵

In reality, the alleged distinction between “Arabs” and “Africans” in Zanzibar is a misnomer which illustrates the government’s attempts to misconstrue the nature of the crisis. The majority of Zanzibaris are Black Muslims who are united in their support of the opposition. CUF supporters include Muslim Zanzibaris whose ancestors were both African and Arab. Muganda’s misconstrual of this matter avoids mentioning that most of the majority African population are Muslim – and as the ethnic make-up of CUF supporters shows, Muslims of all ethnic backgrounds are disillusioned with the status quo. While the CCM government has thus accused the CUF opposition of being Muslim fundamentalists driven by extremism and inflexibility, Indiana University anthropologist Nathalie Arnold points out that, in reality, “The CUF has been open to reconciliation and has worked actively to achieve it. It is the government which bluntly and without any attempt at concealment failed to uphold the Commonwealth-brokered agreement of May 1998... The CCM has frequently insulted CUF people...” branding them “vibuzi marika” (small, ridiculous goats) and “vijibuya vya santuri” (dogs).

Unfortunately, the role of the United States has been decidedly supportive of the recent government violence. In a visit to Zanzibar in June 2000, before the elections, U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania Reverend Charles Stith “discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations between the United States and Zanzibar and how Washington could assist the Isles to ensure the October presidential and general elections would be successful”, according to a senior State House official.⁴⁶ On 7 December 2000 - in the aftermath of the rigged elections and the accompanying government crackdown on the popular CUF opposition party and its supporters, masterminded by President Karume - the U.S. Ambassador paid a “courtesy call” to the Zanzibar President. Reverend Stith went on to commend Karume’s desire “to reach out to all segments of

⁴⁴ Peter, C. M. (Professor and Chairman of LAC), *The Legal Aid Committee Condemns the Senseless Killing of Innocent Civic United Front (CUF) Supporters and the Arrest and Incarceration of their Leaders*, Legal Aid Committee, University of Dar es Salaam, 28 January 2001.

⁴⁵ See IHRG Press Release, ‘Tanzanian Government Crackdown on Muslims in Zanzibar’, Islamic Human Rights Commission, London, 16 February 2001.

⁴⁶ Simbeye, Finnigan wa, ‘US Ambassador visits Zanzibar President’, IPP Media, 13 June 2000, <http://www.ippmedia.com>

the Zanzibar political spectrum and community to improve life for every Zanzibari." Meanwhile, rather than condemning the government's annulment of meaningful democracy in the rigged October elections, he criticised the CUF, declaring that he was dismayed that CUF leaders Seif and Masoud Hamad "chose to maintain a hard-line refusal to work with others to find a viable and nonpartisan solution to make multiparty democracy work in Zanzibar."⁴⁷ As a United Methodist clergyman from Boston, Reverend Stith's approach appears to be clearly supportive of the pro-Christian, anti-Muslim establishment.

The recent outbreak of police brutality unleashed on civilians thus appears to be the latest stage in a Tanzanian Government campaign to demonise the Muslim community of Zanzibar. Furthermore, the current climate strongly suggests that the crisis is likely to escalate. While the U.S. Ambassador has commended President Amani Karume's alleged willingness "to reach out to all segments of the Zanzibar political spectrum", the Zanzibar President in turn has congratulated his security forces for the "fine job they have done preventing violence in Zanzibar". As Arnold and McKim observe, the recent events "are the culmination of a long-term pattern of violent repression and non-violent resistance. But they are the worst since 1964, and they have contributed to the increasing polarization of political discourse and affiliation in Zanzibar and Tanzania as a whole. Security forces acting under the express orders of the Union government have created a climate in which the possibility of reconciliation and stability in Zanzibar is increasingly unlikely."⁴⁸

Developments in the aftermath of the elections have confirmed this future projection. Two months after Amani Karume won the presidency, a series of bombings on 26 December shook the island and injured a member of Zanzibar's Electoral Commission. The government arrested 40 opposition supporters, alleging their affiliation to "the blue guard", an alleged militant wing of the CUF. CUF leaders and supporters accused the government of staging the explosions as a pretext for escalating the crackdown on the population. The accuracy of this view was confirmed by Indiana anthropologist Nathalie Arnold: "The CCM government is setting off bombs in order to execute arrests of youths. If Islam is responsible for anything in Zanzibar it is for maintaining peace. Rather than inciting anyone to violence, it is people's religious faith that has contributed most significantly to continued nonviolence and forbearance in the face of a government which is increasingly, by any standards, immoral."⁴⁹

Islamic Human Rights Commission sources further indicate the continuing perpetration "of indiscriminate shootings" against Muslims, "so many that mass graves are being used to cover up the numbers. Apparently a *topi* or *jalabah* is enough to warrant being shot by some of the island's police force." Indeed, "Muslims are being killed tortured, imprisoned and raped throughout Zanzibar, though especially in Pemba. All those that have been killed are Muslim."⁵⁰ In this respect, the pertinent concerns of the eminent Tanzanian scholar, Hamza Mustafa Njozi, are worth noting: "We do not seem to have drawn any meaningful lesson from the Rwanda tragedy of 1994... Tanzania may do well to learn something from the social roots of that chilling tragedy. For what happened in Rwanda could happen in Tanzania."⁵¹

⁴⁷ 'US won't withdraw aid from Tanzania', *The Guardian*, 15 December 2000, <http://www.newafrica.com/news/>.

⁴⁸ Arnold and McKim, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Cited in Aidi, Hisham, op. cit.

⁵⁰ IHRC source, 31 January 2001; 19 March 2001. The *topi* and *jalabah* are styles of clothing in Muslim culture; a *topi* is a male head covering, while a *jalabah* is a female style of dress.

⁵¹ Njozi, op. cit., Chapter 4.

If developments continue in this fashion, the current crackdown is liable to result in a dramatic rise in government abuses against the population, due to its failure to suppress the broad-based opposition movement. With tensions escalating and the government becoming increasingly bold in its war on legitimate popular dissent, the future of Zanzibar is likely to be fraught with crisis, unless the international community takes significant measures to subdue the government's fascist-style policies. [END]